



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
 Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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INTELLIGENT MUSIC TEACHING.

BY MRS. SPENCER CURWEN.

THE Editor has asked me to reply to the very interesting and thoughtful letter in the current number of the *Parents' Review*, signed C. E. Drummond, Ceylon. I will take the writer's ideas in order:—

(1) The parallel between the teaching of Music and of Drawing.

May I quote from an old P.N.E.U. paper of my own? The paragraph refers to the statement—that without a clearly-defined *aim* we can have no *method*.

“What is our aim in teaching Music? This is emphatically a question for parents. Why are you paying for these music lessons for your boy, your girl? Have you any definite purpose, or are they only learning because others learn? You will say—‘Our object is that they may play the piano.’ True; but is this all? For if it be all, or even the chief aim, then I fear much time and money are thrown away. Think how many thousands of children in England every year *begin* to learn to play the piano, and how few of them become even tolerable performers. This is evidently not a sufficient reason. But, take a kindred subject—Drawing. Here you give a different kind of answer to the question. You say—‘I do not teach my child to draw because I intend that he shall be an artist, though there may be a possibility of that. I teach him because it compels him to observe; because it will help him by-and-by to appreciate art. In that sense at least he may be an artist.’ And, with this end in view, you are careful that his lessons are of a kind that will draw out whatever artistic faculty there may be in him, and train his eye to *intelligent seeing*. Now, I should say just the same thing about the Music lessons. ‘My child may turn out a brilliant pianist, or she may not, but my aim must be to draw out whatever musical faculty there may be in her; to make her at least an appreciative musician; to train her ear to *intelligent listening*.’ Therefore I must see to it that her lessons are of a kind that will achieve that end.”

So far we have a parallel; but we must not try to carry it too far. Identity of aim in the main does not include identity of possibilities in detail. The same general principles underlie the teaching of all subjects; but the relative importance of those principles to one another is necessarily modified by the technicalities of the subject taught, and so are the possibilities of original work. Composition, in music, means, perhaps, a little more than composition in painting; and, when we ask for “original” work, we make a greater demand on the musician than on the painter. To go fully into this would take more time and space than we need to spend just now, but one thing is certain, that to attempt to teach average children to “compose” music in any real sense would be a task beset with grave difficulties. It would require a far higher degree of musicianship than we have any right to expect in the governess who teaches general subjects and does not specialize in music, but who has, nevertheless, to teach beginners; a far higher *kind* of musicianship than we find in the average music teacher. I know pretty well the things that the average teacher *can't* do, and one of them is to “compose” a good melody of even one or two measures in length, suitable for an ear-exercise.

But there *is* an element of Music in which a child's ingenuity and invention may be exercised from the earliest stage, and that is rhythm. Rhythm—time without tune—is the most primitive form of music, and the sense of rhythm develops in most children very early, and before the sense of time. Those who use the “Child Pianist” method know that the invention of rhythm forms part of the child's earliest work, and every new “time-name” that he learns is an addition to a stock of material with which he can form endless combinations. Rhythm may be called the skeleton, which, when clothed upon with the flesh and blood of melody and harmony, becomes the living thing—“Music.” The pupil who acquires facility in the invention of rhythm has got hold of an important element of musical form, and a teacher of average ability can learn how to guide a child in this kind of inventive work.

(2) The writer of the letter says that—“to be able to reproduce in line or colour the work of someone else is a somewhat useless accomplishment.” This is very true, though it has

taken several generations to find it out. But "reproduction" in music is on a different footing, and we would sometimes be glad if our great interpreters would be content to reproduce and not insist upon composing! The artist paints his picture, and it tells its own story to multitudes of the uninitiated. But the musical composer writes his work, and to all but the initiated his score is a dead thing. Then comes the artist-*interpreter*, and in his hands it comes to life, and multitudes of the uninitiated hear and enjoy. In this case reproduction is not only an achievement but a necessity, and the person who can thus reproduce is called an "artist," a title which we do not give to a copier of pictures.

(3) The question is asked — "Should not the musical training be such as to enable the performers (1) to play correctly and grammatically 'by ear' (is this exactly what the writer means?); (2) to read music without the aid of an instrument, *i.e.*, to realize it by looking at it; (3) to write down music that he hears; (4) to transpose?" and again, "These are regarded as the higher branches of musical education; *ought they not to be taught in some degree from a much earlier stage?*" Decidedly they ought; and they do form a regular part of the "Child Pianist" course, which is entirely an elementary course.

(4) Fräulein Diez, in her excellent article in the Jan. (1897) number, rightly described the ordinary instruction book, pointing out that after the first few easy tunes the recreative music contains "everything the pupil is *not* ready for." In the reading exercises and recreative music of the "Child Pianist," the pupil never finds anything for which he has not been prepared in a previous lesson.

(5) Teachers are "trained to *teach* in contradistinction to trained to *perform*" vocal music at the summer session of the Tonic Sol-fa College, London, and pianoforte in the "Child Pianist" training classes held by Miss Scott Gardner, also in London. Nowhere else, so far as I am aware.

All this is, of course, ancient history to the House of Education; but there are, doubtless, many in far-off places who may be helped by a full answer to this letter from Ceylon.

PHYSICAL TRAINING IN GIRLS' SCHOOLS.

As a parent of girls, and an extremely interested observer of the slow and gradual awakening in those who deal with the education of girls in this country to the need for reforms, two reforms strike me as urgent—the need for shorter hours of work, and the need for a properly organised physical education. How many girls' schools in the kingdom are there at this moment, where brain work (in which I include serious study of the arts, as music and drawing) occupies six hours per diem only, and six hours is surely a reasonable maximum. In how many girls' schools is any time *daily* devoted to physical education?

By physical education I do not mean *play*; nor would I suggest that any of the short time now devoted to physical recreation, should be curtailed. Though the physique is improved by games, they can never quite take the place of real physical education and training. I have visited many girls' schools in this country, both high schools and private schools, and at many of them have seen fine gymnasias attached to, or forming part of the school building. With such opportunities, I have enquired how much time daily, is given to physical training, and I have invariably found that one hour a week has been considered enough. If the young frame could be induced to grow only during one hour a week, this arrangement might work admirably. I believe in many schools some attempt is made to have a short drill for ten minutes daily, but I fear that in few cases is the drill taken by a teacher who has studied physical training scientifically.

Drill viewed as a training in precision and prompt obedience to command is always excellent, and can no doubt be taught by anyone possessing quickness of eye and decision of voice; but drill used as a special training in the development of the physique is on a higher plane altogether, and demands skilled teaching. Physical exercises carelessly taught and performed defeat the very object for which they are given, and leave the muscles in worse case than they found them. Every year,